

# Oklahoma Conservation Partnership Report

Summer Issue 2015

[www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov)

VISION: Productive Lands Healthy Environment -- MISSION: Helping People Help the Land



The **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service** rolled out an online portal in May that could save farmers unnecessary trips to town and allow NRCS technicians more time in the field.

The new **Conservation Client Gateway** is a secure site that allows farmers and ranchers to:

- ⇒ Request NRCS technical and financial assistance
- ⇒ Review and sign conservation plans and practice schedules
- ⇒ Complete and sign an application for a conservation program
- ⇒ Review, sign and submit contracts and appendices for conservation programs
- ⇒ Document completed practices and request certification of completed practices
- ⇒ Request and track payments for conservation programs
- ⇒ Store and retrieve technical and financial files, including documents and photographs

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Tim Palmer, a Madison County, Iowa farmer who was among several hundred producers to test the portal, said that he found it easy to use.

Palmer said that he likes being able to contact his NRCS office in the evening. If he's doing field work during the day and finds a problem after an extreme weather event, he can go online later and ask "what might be available to fix one of those problems."

NRCS Chief Jason Weller said the website has a feature similar to Google Maps that allows farmers to zoom in on different tracts of land "to identify natural resource challenges you might want help with," including soil erosion and invasive weeds.

The site will work on a smart phone or tablet and in about a year a streamlined version of the Gateway will be available for phones.

Weller said users will need to have a Service Center Information Management System (SCIMS) record and a USDA Level 2 authentication account. That proves your identity to USDA.

"For the vast majority of our customers, they already have that established," Weller said.

When asked by Agriculture.com if the Gateway can be used to determine conservation compliance (which is administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency), Weller said, "At this time, no."

Nor is the portal set up for complex farming entities like limited liability companies. That will be available in about a year, he said.

"It's only available for individuals," Weller said, or about 80% of the agency's clients.

For more information about Conservation Client Gateway, visit: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway)

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## **Unfunded dams could have saved millions in flood damage**

**Oklahoma dams typically save \$88 million in flood damage annually**



More than 300 unfunded dams are planned for Oklahoma, but haven't been built yet.

"We've identified areas where dams could be used to prevent damages and save lives," Oklahoma Conservation Commission representative Robert Hathorne said. "On average, it's about \$2 million a year to maintain the 2107 dams that we have and in exchange we are receiving millions and millions of dollars in damage that's not occurring."

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Water Resource Office said if the 331 planned dams had been in place, they would have prevented \$6.1 million in flood damage over the Memorial Day weekend alone.

Current flood control dams prevented \$96.3 million in flood damage to land, homes and businesses over the last couple months.

The USDA estimates an additional \$21.4 million could have been saved April 18 through May 25 if the unfunded dams had been built.

**Eufaula Lake and Dam – photo Courtesy: US Army Corps of Engineers**



# ***MAY is ASIAN AMERICAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER (AA/PI) HERITAGE MONTH***

*submitted by Kevin Spears*



The month of **May** is the **AA/PI Heritage Month!** This year's **theme** is: “**Many Cultures, One Voice: Promote Equality and Inclusion**”. To appreciate the many ways that cultural diversity benefits our community, please take the time to get involved with AA/PI activities and events that will be taking place in your community. As we have a share in getting our internal/external customers aware and educated with the benefits that comes from embracing cultural diversity, please take the time to document and forward to me via email the many activities and experiences so that we can share our joy with others!

Kevin Spears is the District Conservationist in the NRCS Mangum Field Service Center. Kevin serves as Oklahoma's Asian American/Pacific Islander Special Emphasis Program Manager.

The [AA/PI Oklahoma SharePoint folder](#) has related items post to this special emphasis program or contact Kevin - [Kevin.Spears@ok.usda.gov](mailto:Kevin.Spears@ok.usda.gov)

## **About Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month**

May is Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month – a celebration of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States. A rather broad term, Asian-Pacific encompasses all of the Asian continent and the Pacific islands of Melanesia (New Guinea, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji and the Solomon Islands), Micronesia (Marianas, Guam, Wake Island, Palau, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and the Federated States of Micronesia) and Polynesia (New Zealand, Hawaiian Islands, Rotuma, Midway Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, French Polynesia and Easter Island).

Like most commemorative months, Asian-Pacific Heritage Month originated in a congressional bill. In June 1977, Reps. Frank Horton of New York and Norman Y. Mineta of California introduced a House resolution that called upon the president to proclaim the first ten days of May as Asian-Pacific Heritage Week. The following month, senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga introduced a similar bill in the Senate. Both were passed. On October 5, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed a Joint Resolution designating the annual celebration. Twelve years later, President George H.W. Bush signed an extension making the week-long celebration into a month-long celebration. In 1992, the official designation of May as Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month was signed into law. The month of May was chosen to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843, and to mark the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869. The majority of the workers who laid the tracks were Chinese immigrants.

## **2015 Asian-Pacific Heritage Month Poster**





## Major County plants 1329 acres of grass this Spring through fiscal year 2015 EQIP funds

submitted by Cindy Bierig, Major County Conservation District

The Major County Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)-Fairview Office, assisted local producers in planting 1329.9 acres of grass this Spring through fiscal year 2015 Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds. Major County producers were able to take advantage of the moisture provided this year to plant their grass, although it was very difficult at times to get into the field to plant the grass with the abundant moisture. Most of the crop fields contained highly erodible soils that now will be protected from wind and water erosion, and still be very productive for the operators in hay and/or grass for livestock production. Fields planted this year were planted to Bermuda grass or old world bluestem, an additional 220 acres were planned and contracted this year to plant to Bermuda grass, old world bluestem or native grass mixes. Through FY 2015 EQIP, we were able to assist our producers in permanently covering / protecting 1549.9 acres of soils from future erosion, protecting our streams, water and air quality while still being able to utilize and protect the Resource.



Bermuda grass spreading, covering the soil approximately 40 days after sprigging. The field on the right was no-till sprigged on sandy soils to reduce erosion, suppress weed competition and manage available moisture.



The field on the left was sprigged to Ozark Bermuda grass in 2013 and the field on the right was contracted to sprig in 2015. Both of these fields contain similar HEL soils that are susceptible to wind erosion.

It is a privilege to be able to work with our producers, helping them accomplish their conservation and production goals while conserving, protecting and still using the resources we and they are entrusted with in a sustainable manner. These fields are HEL sandy soils sprigged in 2010 that yielded 6 tons / ac during the 2014 hay crop. In the past these corner acres around an irrigated circle might have been neglected and / or resulted in soil leaving the site during wind erosion events. Now look at them today!





## USDA StrikeForce Initiative - Oklahoma

Oklahoma has been added to the list of 21 states to be participating in the recently expanded United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative. USDA's StrikeForce Initiative was established in 2010 to address specific challenges with persistent rural poverty. The initiative will provide additional Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds for 32 counties in Oklahoma, as well as provide economic benefit to these areas. Oklahoma Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), collaborators and partners have been focused on outreach efforts and assistance in accelerating the delivery of NRCS' available technical and financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and communities in these counties. StrikeForce funds will be allocated to counties with pre-approved applications to address existing National, State, and Local resource concerns for Fiscal Year (FY)2015. All practices available under regular EQIP are available in the StrikeForce Initiative. The following counties for Oklahoma included in this initiative for FY2015: Adair, Atoka, Bryan, Caddo, Cherokee, Choctaw, Cimarron, Coal, Delaware, Garvin, Greer, Harmon, Haskell, Hughes, Johnston, Kiowa, Latimer, LeFlore, Marshall, Mayes, McCurtain, McIntosh, Muskogee, Okfuskee, Okmulgee, Ottawa, Pittsburg, Pontotoc, Pushmataha, Seminole, Sequoyah and Tillman.

In order to promote and encourage rural community growth, provide awareness of opportunities through StrikeForce and to increase participation in StrikeForce there were nine outreach workshops held between May 12 and June 6, 2015. These workshops were held in Okfuskee, Caddo, Ottawa, Seminole, Atoka, Sequoyah, and Choctaw counties and in the rural community of Boley, Oklahoma. These workshops were strategically held in locations to reach multiple counties. The funds received in Oklahoma will be utilized to address resources concerns that are facing rural farmers and ranchers in the 32 counties. According to Dr. Carol Crouch, "These StrikeForce outreach workshops provided an excellent way to raise awareness of the opportunities for rural communities and individuals. These workshops were an excellent example of the strong working relationship between USDA partners. NRCS district conservationists; Thomas James, Stacey Mathis, Cynthia Ward, Mark Maples, Audra Fenton, Amanda Stanford, Michael Ramming, Steven Davied, Scott Pace and acting district conservationist, Derek Kelso played an important role in making these workshops possible and successful."



**Nine StrikeForce outreach workshops were held between May 12 and June 6, 2015**

For more information and StrikeForce successes, visit the [NRCS StrikeForce webpage](#) or your [local NRCS office](#)



# Mobile Connections

## **Data Integrating System Turns 12,000 Dams Into a System of Intelligent Infrastructure**

Hartford, Conn.-based UEngineering Solutions unveiled on June 23 a national system to detect incidents that could imperil nearly 12,000 dams across the country. It integrates multiple data streams, including sensors and national seismic and meteorologic data, to issue alerts when heavy storms or earthquakes threaten any dam in the system.

After years of development and testing, DamWatch is live and incorporating all the dams in 47 states that are "federally assisted" by the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

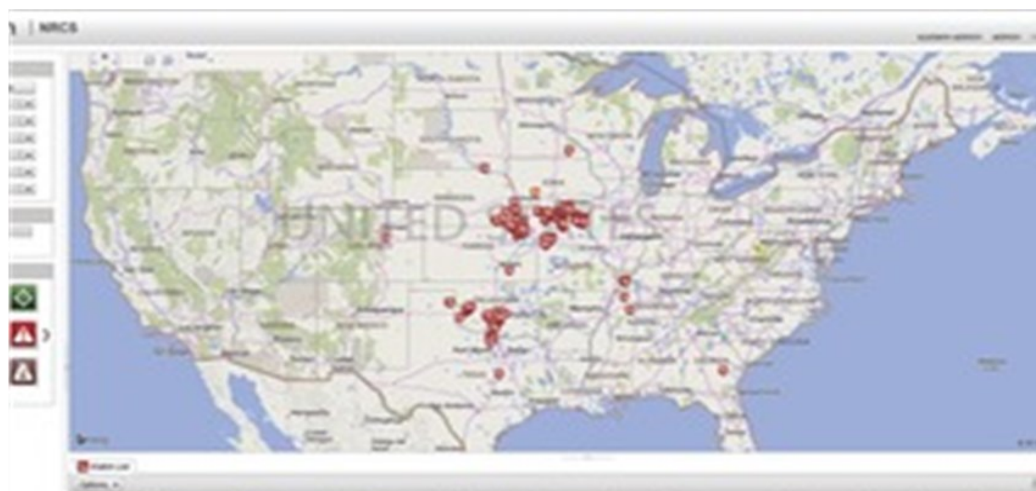
The system not only distributes alerts via fax, email or text to key parties, it also provides secure, web-based access to extensive design and maintenance data about the threatened facility.

"We're sold," says Larry Caldwell, a watershed specialist with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and a retired veteran of 41 years with the NRCS. Oklahoma was a test state for the system. "We're monitoring 2,107 dams, and more than half will have reached their 50-year service life this year," Caldwell says. "Most were constructed to control flooding in agricultural areas, but now some of those areas have houses and businesses and industry."

The system has been tested by torrential rains this spring, sending alerts whenever spillways reached capacity and earthen, vegetated, auxiliary spillways were about to run. "We had 190 auxiliary spillways flow in May, and over 150 in June," Caldwell says.

During May's record rains in the central plains, nearly 1,000 DamWatch alerts helped NRCS personnel focus their response efforts, says NRCS Chief Jason Weller. Service personnel assisted project sponsors in reviewing the condition of hundreds of dams throughout the region.

Caldwell especially likes a feature that lets users create "information tickets" to capture institutional knowledge from the retiring generation of NRCS staffers and project sponsors involved in the original construction of the projects. "These are the little things that make the big difference that will be helpful for the next generation who become responsible for maintenance of the dams," he says. Caldwell says licensing the system, whose fees are borne by the NRCS, costs about \$18 per dam per year.



Graphic Courtesy of DamWatch-

A national view of DamWatch shows alerts blooming as storms move through the Midwest in late June. Each flag is tagged to facility specific data

For more information visit the DamWatch website - <http://www.usengineeringsolutions.com/solutions/damwatch/>





Josh McNeff is the Soil Conservation Technician located in the Guthrie Field Service Center

## June is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month!

submitted by Josh McNeff, Oklahoma LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager

During the month of June, we honor and commemorate the [Stonewall Riots of June 1969](#) in New York's Greenwich Village, which marked the first time that the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community as a group forcefully and vocally asserted their rights to equality under the law. As President Barack Obama states in his 2015 Presidential Proclamation:

*"All people deserve to live with dignity and respect, free from fear and violence, and protected against discrimination, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. During Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month, we celebrate the proud legacy LGBT individuals have woven into the fabric of our Nation, we honor those who have fought to perfect our Union, and we continue our work to build a society where every child grows up knowing that their country supports them, is proud of them, and has a place for them exactly as they are."*

Many people are often surprised to hear the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) talking about sexual orientation and gender identity. Within USDA, we talk about sexual orientation and gender identity because it's just good customer service. USDA is known as the People's Department – we represent a very diverse group of employees and customers, and we have offices in almost every county across the nation. In fact, LGBT people live in over 99% of counties, therefore we occupy the same space. It's just good customer service to reach out to the people who live and work in the communities we serve. We are also working to address historic discrimination against the LGBT community that was perpetuated through the [Lavender Scare and Executive Order 10450](#) signed by President Eisenhower, which allowed thousands of LGBT federal employees to be fired. While we have come a long ways from the Lavender Scare of the 1950's and 1960's, much work remains to be done, as there are many gaps still remaining in legal equality for LGBT Americans and it varies by state. You can learn more about the laws and policies in your state with the [Movement Advancement Project's Equality Maps](#).

A staggering 90 percent of transgender people report experiencing harassment, mistreatment, or discrimination on the job, and 41 percent report attempting suicide compared to 1.6 percent of the general population.

### **The following laws offer protection for transgender federal workers:**

**Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** prohibits sex discrimination in employment. In recent years, courts have increasingly held that discrimination because an employee or job applicant is transgender or gender non-conforming, or because he or she fails to conform to gender stereotypes, is sex discrimination under Title VII.

**The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978** prohibits discrimination by the Federal Government on the basis of "conduct which does not adversely affect the performance" of an applicant or employee.

**USDA's Civil Rights Policy Statement** includes specific protections on the basis of gender identity and expression.

**Executive Order 11478** prohibits discrimination against civilian federal employees or applicants for employment on the basis of gender identity.

**Executive Order 11246** prohibits discrimination by federal contractors against their employees or applicants for employment on the basis of either sexual orientation or gender identity.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer



## High School Student a Valuable Earth Team Volunteer - *submitted by Carol Crouch, State Tribal Liaison*

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) honored their Earth Team volunteers during the week of April 12 -18 by thanking and honoring them for their service to conservation. Oklahoma is honored to have Earth Team volunteers like high school volunteer Karsten Mathis. While most high school students were planning how to spend their spring and summer breaks, Mathis was planning what days he could work as an Earth Team volunteer for NRCS. Mathis has been a volunteer for two spring breaks and this is his third summer. This summer Karsten is assisting NRCS and the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) with the soil health and farm bill workshops that are being held across the state. Karsten plays football, basketball and runs track and maintains a GPA of 4.0. Karsten plans to pursue a career in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and plans on attending University Oklahoma. Karsten stated, "I plan on returning next summer to continue to learn and I enjoyed working with NRCS and their partners." According to Carol Crouch, NRCS State Tribal Liaison, "The Earth Team program provides a great opportunity to our youth to learn about what NRCS does and helps them decide if NRCS may be their career choice."



Karsten helps with NRCS booth at Southwest Tribes Summer Fest



Karsten helps with *Be a Friend to the Pollinator* workshop held for Oklahoma Tribes. He provided each Tribe with a Butterfly kit.

## Stigler 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Fishing Clinic - *submitted by Tom Neumeyer, District Conservationist, Stigler Field Service Center*

The Haskell County Conservation District with assistance from the Stigler NRCS staff, Donna Neumeyer, Poteau NRCS, Lisa Grey, Leflore County Conservation District, and employees with the Oklahoma Forestry Services and Wildlife Department conducted their 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Fishing Clinic at the Stigler Country Club on April 30<sup>th</sup> for all 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in Haskell County. There were over 200 students and teachers from five schools that attended the event. This event offered the opportunity to rotate through 15 minute learning stations teaching about fishing tackle identification, Oklahoma wildlife rules and regulations, casting instructions, and fish identification. The students from the rural schools attended the morning sessions and the Stigler school students attended the afternoon sessions. During the last 45 minutes to one hour of both the morning and afternoon sessions the students actually got to fish around a stocked pond. Each student went home with a new rod and reel provided by a tremendous support from area businesses. Attached is a photo showing NRCS Earth Team Volunteer, Debra Neumeyer, assisting two students retrieve a fish hook out of the mouth of a channel catfish. This was the first time for many of the students to actually fish.





## Oklahoma NRCS Summer Interns - submitted by Gilbert Guerrero, Assistant State Conservationist - Outreach

As summer begins so does the annual ritual of bringing new students and staff to the state. This year NRCS welcomes 10 new pathways students. They range from Soil Conservationists, Range Conservationist and Engineers. This year Oklahoma has been a part of a new program to reach out to High School Students and have brought 2 students active in Agriculture in their communities.

This year the Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) brought them together at the state office in Stillwater to meet the leadership and get a chance to meet with their mentors for the summer. The CRAC also treated them to a picnic and some time to visit with the other students. They were introduced into the NRCS family by talking about Soils by Steve Alspach, Mentoring by David Hungerford and wisdom from the other State Leadership Team (SLT) in attendance.

The goal of the CRAC is to help provide a conduit for the students to speak freely to the committee members about any issues that arise and give the students some advice to have a successful summer in our field offices. The committee has found out from previous students that are now employees, the summer picnic was a great opportunity for them to meet and be able to communicate.

As Gary O'Neill, Oklahoma State Conservationist stated "We want to make this a successful venture for both the students and our staff". Commenting at the picnic, "This opportunity you have in front of you, gives you a chance to try us out as well as try you out." Even though the meeting was in a casual work environment the SLT was able to visit with the CRAC and the students to talk about future plans and what else the committee can do to help Gary and the staff in Oklahoma.



CRAC member Andrea Lane - R, enjoys lunch with an Intern



Interns received a Soil Health Demonstration from Oklahoma State Soil Scientist, Steve Alspach



Oklahoma NRCS Summer Interns 2015

## **Help From Above** - *submitted by Jennifer Mosteller, Soil Conservation Technician, Pauls Valley Field Service Center*

After the June 18<sup>th</sup> storm event, also known as Tropical Storm Bill, The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Pauls Valley office and District employees from Garvin and Murray Counties, along with Conservation Commission employees, were scrambling to check all 214 Flood Control Dams in Garvin and Murray Counties. There were 78 dams with Emergency Spillways flowing, but some of them were too muddy to get into. Two Garvin County Emergency Management team members brought their drone and met the Pauls Valley NRCS employees on two flood control structures as well as the Longmire Lake Dam to check for Emergency Spillway flows.



**Garvin County Emergency Management Drone**



**Aerial view of Longmire Lake Dam**



**Bird's Eye (or Drone) View of Emergency Spillway flowing on Chigley Sandy 6 in Garvin County**



## Critter's Crossroads - *submitted by Andrea Jones, Hughes County Conservation District*

The Hughes County Conservation District gave a presentation to the Calvin 4H After School Program over one of their new educational resource trunks titled "Critters Crossroads". The 54 students and 7 adults learned about the different types of animals, how to tell the difference between similar tracks and how to read the signs that animals leave behind.

The students broke into groups to compete against each other for the top "Extreme Tracker" 1<sup>st</sup> place team. Each group read the track cards and guessed which and how many animals were at the site and what types of interactions they had. The students then tried to identify which animal was represented by three different signs: tracks, scat and skulls.

The District received a grant from the Ouachita Mountains Resources, Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council which helped purchase the items for this new educational resource trunk which will be used at area schools. Ouachita Mountains RC&D covers all of southeast Oklahoma. The District would like to express their thanks for the funding on this important program.

For further information on this educational program or on any other program, please contact the Hughes County Conservation District at 405-379-2570 or by email at [hughesccd@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:hughesccd@conservation.ok.gov). Please visit us on Facebook to view the photos from this event at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Hughes-County-Conservation-District/629920750385167> and if you enjoy what you see, be sure to select the "like" button to keep receiving updates on local news, weather, events and programs.



**Reading Animal Track Cards**



**Identifying Animal Skulls**



**"Extreme Tracker" 1st Place Team**



**Identifying Animal Tracks**



## **Flying D Farms Soil Health Workshop** - submitted by Edith Brown, Washita County Conservation District

On May 12, 2015, The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Cordell Field Office and Washita County Conservation District hosted a Soil Health Workshop at the farm of Danny Davis, Flying D Farms. Featured speaker was Ray Archuleta, NRCS Conservation Agronomist/Soil Health Specialist. Classroom learning filled the morning session while field visits to the farms of Danny Davis and Kent Watkins filled the afternoon session. Approximately 55 producers, NRCS personnel and district personnel attended the workshop. Plans are in the works for another workshop next spring.



**Soil Health Workshop at the farm of Danny Davis, Flying D Farms**

## **Nowata County Soil Health Training** - submitted by Julie Lamb, District Conservationist, Nowata Field Service Center

On June 2nd the Nowata Field Office and the Nowata County Conservation District held a Soil Health Training for NRCS employees and District Directors. The training was attended by 25 participants where they reviewed the soil health card and demonstration methods. A tour was set up around the county to conduct different soil health assessments. We looked at a true rangeland site, a pastureland site, a conventional tillage site and a no till tillage system site.



**Nowata County Soil  
Health Training**



## **Muldrow Public Schools Summer Camp** - submitted by Danica Deen, Sequoyah County Conservation District

Audra Fenton, District Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Sallisaw Field Office, along with Danica Deen with the Sequoyah County Conservation District, participated in Muldrow Public Schools Summer Camp for Students. The event was held at Muldrow Public Schools on Thursday, June 11, 2015. Students learned about Soil Health and participated in an outdoor classroom which included a demonstration on erosion. They also planted wildflower seeds in bio-degradable planters to take home. Each participant also received a Sammy the Soil activity and coloring book. There were about 45 students who participated.



**Muldrow Public Schools  
Summer Camp**



## **Sequoyah County Workshop** - submitted by Danica Deen, Sequoyah County Conservation District

On June 22, 2015 the Sallisaw NRCS office, Sequoyah County Conservation District, and the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Committee (OTCAC) partnered to hold a conservation workshop for producers, Tribes, tribal members and women in agriculture. The workshop was held at the Sequoyah County Fairgrounds in Sallisaw with 65 in attendance. NRCS Soil scientist Jake Boyett provided a demonstration with the NRCS rainfall simulator that showed the importance of soil health. Steve Clark, NRCS resource specialist gave a presentation on the benefits of no-till, best management for pasture and rangeland. Representatives for NRCS, FSA, RD, RMA and NASS were also on hand to provide information on 2014 Farm Bill programs and community based funding opportunities. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife and Sequoyah County OSU Extension also had booths set up with information for producers. There were 19 vendor booths set up for producers to browse and many door prizes were given away. Dinner was also provided for all in attendance.



**NRCS rainfall simulator demonstration**



## Jefferson County Outdoor Classroom – submitted by Sandra Nobile, District Conservationist, Waurika Field Service Center

Jefferson County Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service Waurika Field Office held an outdoor classroom on June 4th and 5th at the local library. Over 70 children participated in training each day. This years attendees learned about Pollinators, recycling, soil health, planting plants and vegetables. Stewardship material on pollinators -Our Future Flies On Wings Morning, Noon, & Night explained about importance of pollinators. They painted used tires for planters, then planted plants and vegetables after being educated on the importance of soil health, plant growth and maintenance of plants.



## Field of Oklahoma Dreams – submitted by Wynea Buford, District Conservationist, Purcell Field Service Center

The need to educate our rural and urban producers starts in a classroom and will end in the "Field of Oklahoma Dreams". During this series the McClain and Cleveland County Conservation District and NRCS will partner with several different local, state agencies to educate beginning farmers on conservation measures and resource concerns. This series is not only offered to McClain and Cleveland County producers but to all who would like to attend. **Contact the Purcell Field Service Center for more information - 405-527-3160**



**Our first workshop recorded 32 participants of mixed operations, races, ages and genders**



## Norman Earth Day Festival - submitted by Wynea Buford, District Conservationist, Purcell Field Service Center

Wynea Buford, District Conservationist and Matt Irby, Soil Conservation Technician, both from the Purcell Field Service Center, educated the children (and parents) of the importance of keeping our soils clothed and creating little to no disturbance and to protect the micro and macro life system within the soil during the Norman Earth Day Festival. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) rainfall simulator was presented along with soil information to an estimated 75 attendees of all ages, gender and races.



## Pauls Valley Field Service Center - submitted by Jennifer Mosteller, Soil Conservation Technician, Pauls Valley Field Service Center



The Pauls Valley Field Service Center and The Sulphur Field Service Center helped in the conservation education of 440 pre-kindergarten through second graders, from Pauls Valley and Paoli, at **Pauls Valley's Earth Day Celebration**, April 22nd. Brandon Chandler, Pauls Valley District Conservationist, and Tiffany Green, Sulphur Soil Conservationist, played the "Every Tree for Itself" game with the students.

### The Pauls Valley Land Judging Contest

The Pauls Valley Land Judging Contest was held on March 31st, with five teams from Stratford and Paoli competing. A Stratford team - Avry Wood, Ross Watanave, Brody Behne, and Dyllon Stafford - won Overall Team and the Overall Individual award was given to Brody Behne of that same team. The winning team then went on to win the Central District Contest at Wellston, which included teams from Stillwater to the Red River.



**Wyandotte Nation Environmental Festival** - submitted by Steven Davied, District Conservationist,  
Miami Field Service Center

The Ottawa County Field Service Center attended the Wyandotte Nation Environmental Festival April 24, 2015. Offered were environmental education presentations for grade school children K-6th grade with more than 450 children and adults attending the festival. Steven Davied, Natural Resources Conservations Service, District Conservationist Miami Field Service Center, and Shirley Hudson, Ottawa County Conservation District Secretary, presented information and provided handouts on good resource management practices. Jake Boyett, Soil Scientist Claremore Technical Service, presented a program on Soil Health and demonstrated the Rainfall Simulator for the students.



**Steven Davied, District Conservationist,  
presenting at the Wyandotte Nation  
Environmental Festival**

**Natural Resource Day**

Ottawa County attended Natural Resource Day May 14, 2015 at the Miami High School gymnasium. They also presented Soil Profile and Soil Health information to Miami Grade School students during this event. Approximately 200 students attended the event with their teachers. Steven Davied, NRCS District Conservationist, and Shirley Hudson, Ottawa County Conservation District Secretary presented the information and provided handouts to the students.



**Steven Davied, District Conservationist,  
presenting at Natural Resource Day**



## Summer Interns Participate at the 2015 Choctaw Nation Youth Summit -

*submitted by Carol Crouch, State Tribal Liaison*

The Choctaw Nation Youth Summit continues to grow each year as youth and young adults from southeast Oklahoma flock to this annual event. The Summit was held at the Choctaw traditional grounds, in Tuskahoma, Oklahoma. The theme for the Summit was "Xtreme Leadership" and was held on June 8, 2015. The Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC), USDA Rural Development and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) were sponsors for the youth summit. Other Oklahoma Tribes sponsoring the event were the Choctaw Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, and the Pottawatomie Nation. There were approximately 1,200 people that attended the summit with over 800 of them being youth. Youth between the ages of 14 to 21 attended the summit from Atoka, Bryan, Carter, Choctaw, Coal, Garvin, Haskell, Hughes, Johnston, Latimer, LeFlore, Love, Marshall, McCurtain, Murray, Pittsburg, Pontotoc, and Pushmataha counties. Dr. Carol Crouch, State Tribal Liaison, Derek Kelso, Soil Conservationist, Hugo Field Service Center, High School American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) student interns Cash Dowers and Kasey Jo Blevins and Earth Team volunteer Karsten Mathis represented NRCS at the summit. The summit was designed to motivate and inspire youth and young adults to continue their education and seek careers in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). Crouch stated, "Cash, Blevins and Mathis were introduced at the summit and were given the opportunity to share what they are doing as an intern and a volunteer for NRCS. Crouch added, "The summit provides a great opportunity for NRCS to share with our future leaders and employees what NRCS does as an agency and the opportunities through the NRCS AISES and Earth Team volunteer programs".



Top Left: Cash Dowers, Kasey Jo Blevins and Karsten Mathis

Top Right: Youth between the ages of 14 to 21 attended the summit

Bottom Left: Over 800 students visited the NRCS booth from 18 counties at the Choctaw Youth Summit.



**Ottawa County Soil Health Field Day** - submitted by Steven Davied, District Conservation, Miami Field Service Center

The Ottawa County Conservation District held a Soil Health Field Day on May 20th, 2015 at the Miller Pecan Company in Afton Oklahoma. They provided information to landowners on the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs as well as provided a soil health demonstration by utilizing the Rainfall Simulator. Steven Davied, District Conservationist provided information to landowners about the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and EQIP-StrikeForce programs as well as answered several landowner's questions. Jake Boyett, Soil Scientist in the Claremore Technical Service Office, conducted the rainfall simulator and discussed soil health practices. Approximately 75 landowners were in attendance.



**Jake Boyett, Soil Scientist in the Claremore Technical Service Office, conducting the Rainfall Simulator**

**Alabaster Caverns Outdoor Classroom** - submitted by William Greuel, Soil Conservationist, Cherokee Field Service Center

On Monday, May 4<sup>th</sup> 2015 Woods and Alfalfa County Natural Resource Conservation Service and District employees partnered up to lead the annual outdoor classroom at Alabaster Caverns State Park. This outdoor program was geared toward K-6<sup>th</sup> graders; approximately 40 students were present. There were four stations setup in which students rotated through to learn about various natural resource topics, and of course to keep things interesting, we included hands on activities as well. Lunch was prepared by Shelly Oliphant and to top the day off students were given a guided tour through the cavern.



**Alabaster Caverns Outdoor Classroom**





## No-Till on the Plains Whirlwind Expo - *submitted by Jenna Bruer, Caddo County Conservation District*

On July 14, No-Till on the Plains held a Whirlwind Expo at the Mindemann Farms near Apache. There was a great turnout of approximately 52 producers. Soil demonstrations, soil health demonstrations, and a rainfall simulator were apart of the morning events. These demonstrations gave producers an excellent look at why they should consider No Till as an option in their farming operations.

The Oklahoma Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff demonstrated the importance of residue cover for erosion prevention using the rainfall simulator. Also demonstrated was the importance of soil structure that can be restored and built using continuous no-till systems.

Oklahoma State University machinery specialist, Randy Taylor, shared his research on no-till seeding systems, GPS accuracy, yield monitor data, using sensors in variable rate applications of crop inputs and seeding equipment for no-till systems.

Matt Alig, a no-tiller in Okarche, talked about his unique no-till system. Alig has been no-tilling since 1997 and his operation consists of both cropland and grass. He prefers to graze crops rather than harvest grain given the extreme weather variability of freeze and hail risk, and is using several species of pasture and cover crops.

Jimmy Emmons, a no-tiller in Leedey, shared what he has learned from using no-till and cover crops. Emmons started using cover crops 3 years ago as a way to improve soil health and invested in soil moisture probes to assess how much water they were actually using.



It's a demonstration that Steve Alspach has done dozens of times. But the results always seem convincing.

Steve Alspach (right), soil scientist for the Oklahoma NRCS, and soil scientist (retired) Greg Scott, discuss the results of a rainfall simulator at the recent No-Till on the Plains Whirlwind Expo near Apache, Okla. At far right, untilled soil with native vegetation had the cleanest runoff and highest water infiltration (seen in rear jugs), while at center, soil from tilled cotton fields had the most runoff and far less infiltration.

After this demonstration was over, he took the aluminum pan with clean-tilled soil, dumped it upside down onto a plastic tarp, and noted the bottom of the pan was dry, meaning little or no moisture filtered through the soil.

### No-till on the Plains - Apache, OK

**Durant Field Service Center** - submitted by Valerie Hannon, District Conservationist,  
*Durant Field Service Center*

**Farmers' Market Outreach**

While gathered around the bounty of various Bryan County fruit and vegetable producers, USDA staff discussed how the Farm Bill programs apply to these specialty producers. The Choctaw Nation Farmers' Market was a good stage that lent itself well to interaction with these busy producers. Invited by Peggy Carlton, Choctaw Nation WIC & Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Coordinator, this July 1<sup>st</sup> outreach event reached 6 specialty producers.

Valerie Hannon, District Conservationist for the Durant Natural Resources Conservation Service, highlighted topics ranging from seasonal high tunnels and irrigation to transitioning to organic production. Packets were also distributed covering conservation planning assistance, Environmental Quality Incentives Program applications, healthy soils and historically underserved producers.



**Choctaw Nation Farmers' Market**



## Bryan County Annual Farm & Ranch Outreach Tour



The Bryan County Annual Farm & Ranch Outreach Tour, held on July 7, 2015, highlighted conservation in the Caddo area, the north central part of Bryan County. Forty-seven participants toured conservation highlights on four ranches before settling at the Caddo School Cafeteria. The tour visited a strand of eastern gamagrass that was established ten years ago with part of it being maintained with fertilizer, while the other part has had no fertilizer added.

The second stop featured an area where part of the brushy encroachment had been cleared and reclaimed. The Bryan Conservation District demonstrated their rental tree shear, then distributed information about other equipment that is available for completing conservation practices. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) representatives discussed the use of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to assist producers with brush management.

Sam Smith, Bryan County Conservation District supervisor and retired Agricultural Research Service and rancher, discussed his experience with the establishment and use of old world bluestem. NRCS discussed participation in the Conservation Stewardship Program.



Jordan Green, Rangeland Management Specialist, showed examples of various warm season grasses and discussed their advantages. Finally, the Farm Service Agency discussed some of their Farm Bill Programs. Sammie Adams encouraged the group to consider joining the Bryan County Cattle Producers Association. The group was then treated to a BBQ meal provided by Durant Stockyard owners, Jeff and Rebecca Hazaleus.

## Employee Spotlight: In Memory of Kevin Cook

For Kevin Cook, Civil Engineer at the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Office, a career with the agency offers the right amount of variety. After receiving his Bachelors of Science in Agricultural Engineering from Oklahoma State University (OSU), Kevin began working for the USDA Research Center. In June 2004, he shifted gears and started with NRCS. "I really enjoy both the people I work with and the variety of projects I get to be involved with," Kevin said. "I never know what the day will bring, this keeps things exciting." Kevin said he has learned how to prioritize projects and use his time effectively.

When Kevin needs assistance, he said he often turns to the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. "We have a mutually beneficial relationship where we both work to help each other," Kevin said. "They are good people and are all easy to work with." It is partnerships like this which make the agency stronger as a whole.

In the field, Kevin said he has enjoyed working on a large variety of projects. One of his most memorable projects was working to produce a decommissioning report for the Cottonwood 15 flood control structure. Kevin said due to the hazard classification, the structure would either need to be rehabilitated or decommissioned. "We just couldn't find a viable option to rehab," Kevin said. The process was a team effort to "dig in" and try and find the reason for the failure of the structure. Kevin said looking for the faults in something is valuable because in the future he will know how to correct them.

Kevin said he also enjoys trainings and teaching others about engineering practices. The Engineering for Conservation Planning training is one activity Kevin said he really enjoys. "We pick two to three topics and give the trainees a good overview," Kevin said. In the previous years, Kevin said they have covered topics such as pond staking and erosion. Kevin said he is satisfied with the work he is doing and his position as Civil Engineer. In his spare time, he spends time with his two children, who are each students at OSU, and enjoys camping and taking his boat to the lake.

*Post Script: Kevin passed away June 11, 2015 at the age of 46. A few months prior, this article was written by Liana Wagner, Soil Conservationist at the Stillwater Field Office (formerly State Office Engineering Dept. Student Intern).*

*Kevin graduated from Glencoe High School in 1986, then from Oklahoma State University in 1991 with a Bachelors Degree in Agricultural Engineering. His career with the USDA began at the Agricultural Research Station (ARS) in 1986 and continued at the NRCS until his death. He could honestly refer to it as a "dam" good occupation with many "dam" good co-workers; Dilbert cartoons hit a little too close to home all too frequently. Kevin's greatest joy was his children, and spending time with family and friends at reunions, car shows, sports events, OSU tailgates, motorcycle activities, boating, golf and church functions were all important to him. He received great satisfaction in coaching an untold number of young people in various sports, expecting each to achieve great things with honest efforts. A diehard Glencoe Panthers and OSU Cowboys fan, he thoroughly enjoyed any and all sports. Kevin is greatly missed.*



Until we meet again, Dam friend -

Oklahoma NRCS



## Fairview FFA members win championships at State FFA Interscholastic competition



At the end of April, the Oklahoma Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Soil and Water Conservation Society sponsored the Soil and Water Conservation contest for the State FFA Career Development Event. This contest involves a written exam testing students' knowledge in surveying techniques, land measurement, public land surveying system and soil and conservation practices. It also has field exercises that include challenges in pacing, using a hand level and using a survey instrument to determine elevations. Congratulations to the Fairview FFA Chapter for winning this contest. A big thank you for all the folks who helped make this happen... Brandon Reavis, Brandy Pietz-Jones, Steve Glasgow, Victor Slowik, Ted Kersten and Gary Utley.

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